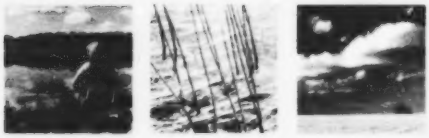

highlights

APPROVED WATER MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR
THE SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN RIVER BASIN

Alberta

This plan reflects a balance between protecting the aquatic environment and the amount of river water required for economic development in the South Saskatchewan River Basin.

106-07401/

message from the minister

The Water Management Plan for the South Saskatchewan River Basin will be our guide for the beginning of our journey into a new era of water management. In this era, we will have a much greater appreciation for the value of water and also of its limits. We will manage water more intensively, with more innovation, more flexibility, with greater attention to the needs of the aquatic environment, and overall sustainability.

The purpose of this plan is to set the broad direction for water management in the SSRB, given present circumstances. This water management plan was developed with the thoughts, values, knowledge and experience of many water users, stakeholders and other members of the public with an interest in the water resource. To all those who helped in this work over the past several years; I offer a heartfelt thank you.

This plan was built with a keen appreciation of the importance of water to our economy, to the role water has played in our history, and also of the effects of our water use that have become apparent in the aquatic ecosystems.

Most importantly, this plan recognizes there are limits to our water resources, and it provides the direction on how to best manage our water resources. Water is a unique resource in that it renews itself each year, but in amounts that are difficult to predict. Southern Albertans have experienced desperately dry years, contrasted by times of devastating flooding. Through these experiences, we have learned many lessons on how to live within the limits of the water resource.

The water management plan for the South Saskatchewan River Basin provides long term vision for water management in Southern Alberta. It is a tangible success under Alberta's *Water for Life* strategy, and demonstrates the Government of Alberta's commitment to protecting our watersheds. With the guidance of this plan, we will now begin to unleash the innovativeness of Alberta to use the water resource as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Guy Boutilier
Alberta Environment Minister

More than 80 per cent of southern Alberta water users involved with this planning process – including industry, environmental, and local community leaders – support the basin closures of the Bow, Oldman and South Saskatchewan River sub-basins.

This water management plan reflects a balance between protecting the aquatic environment and the amount of river water required for economic development in the South Saskatchewan River Basin (SSRB). It is a practical example of the watershed planning approach listed in Alberta's *Water for Life* strategy.

Over the past several years, Albertans were asked for their views on the direction water management should take in the SSRB. Their comments and concerns were carefully considered in the preparation of this plan. More than 80 per cent of southern Alberta water users involved with this planning process – including industry, environmental, and local community leaders – support Alberta Environment no longer accepting water applications for new water allocations in the Bow, Oldman and South Saskatchewan River sub-basins.

The water management plan for the SSRB is critically important at this point in time. It defines how water should be respected, now and into the future. It brings clarity to questions that have been posed for many years. The aquatic environments of all the rivers have a demonstrated need for protection, while the economy of southern Alberta depends on water for its life blood. A growing population and economy are putting unprecedented pressures on the water resource, on the aquatic environment and on the security of existing allocations. The intent of this plan is to accelerate steps the citizens of the SSRB have already taken on the path towards a sustainable economy and environment.

The intent of this plan is to accelerate steps the citizens of the SSRB have already taken on the path towards a sustainable economy and environment.

The plan provides guidance to decision makers and acts as a foundation for future watershed management planning of sub-basins in the SSRB by Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils, as well as stewardship groups. Strong linkages between water quality, land use and water quantity may now be further pursued. Improved cooperation between all stakeholders is expected and encouraged to occur.

The plan recognizes and accepts that limits for water allocations have been reached or exceeded in the Bow, Oldman, and South Saskatchewan River sub-basins. It is also recognized that the limit of the water resource will be reached in the Red Deer River sub-basin.

principal recommendations

The principal recommendations contained in this plan are:

> Alberta Environment no longer accept applications for new water allocations in the Bow, Oldman and South Saskatchewan River Sub-basins until the Minister of Environment specifies, through a Crown Reservation, how water not currently allocated is to be used.

> Water be allocated from the Crown Reservation only for:

- Water conservation objectives;
- Storage of peak flows to mitigate impacts on the aquatic environment and to support existing licences. (Alberta Environment will assist the Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils in evaluations of the potential for on-stream and off-stream storage.);
- Licences and registrations that may be issued for applications and registrations pending at the date of the Crown Reservation[1]. (This does not necessarily imply approval; but the pending applications and registration will be reviewed.);
- First Nations Reserves

> When allocations in the Red Deer River Sub-basin reach 550,000 cubic decametres, a thorough review will be conducted to identify the maximum allocation limit.

other recommendations

Other recommendations and provisions included are:

> Form a committee to promote coordination of water management across the SSRB. The membership should include representation from the Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils in the Bow, Oldman and Red Deer Sub-basins and the South Saskatchewan River Sub-basin.

> Alberta Environment continue to manage the SSRB as a whole, in order to meet the *Master Agreement on Apportionment* requirements. It is recommended that the aforementioned committee prepare an apportionment operations plan for consideration by the Director under the Water Act.

A Crown Reservation is a tool under the Water Act that allows the Minister of Environment to specify the purposes for which any unallocated water can be used.

[1] This includes:

> Little Bow Project/ Highwood Diversion Plan within the provisions for the project as set by the Natural Resources Conservation Board/ Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency Joint Review Panel regarding NRCB Application 9601, May 1998;

> Pine Coulee Water Management Project within the provisions for the project as set by the Natural Resources Conservation Board/ Environmental Assessment Review Process Joint Review Panel regarding NRCB Application 9401, February 1995.

As outlined in Alberta's Water Act, a water conservation objective is the amount and quality of water necessary for the protection of a natural water body or its aquatic environment, or any part of them. It may also include water necessary to maintain a rate of flow or water level requirements.

> Alberta Environment establish Water Conservation Objectives (WCOs) for the Bow, Oldman and South Saskatchewan River Sub-basins. Any licences issued for applications received after May 1, 2005 be subject to the following water conservation objective:

The water conservation objective should be *45% of the natural rate of flow, or the existing instream objective plus 10%, whichever is greater at any point in time.*

Additional recommendations concerning water conservation objectives in these sub-basins are contained in the plan.

> Alberta Environment establish water conservation objectives for the Red Deer River Sub-basin. Any licences issued for applications received after May 1, 2005 be subject to the following water conservation objectives:

- *Upstream of the confluence with the Blindman River, to Dickson Dam*
  - For new licences or existing licences with a retrofit provision, a rate of flow that is 45% of the natural rate of flow, or 16 cms (cubic metres per second), whichever is greater at any point in time.
- *Downstream of the confluence with the Blindman River:*
  - For future licences that withdraw from November to March inclusive, a rate of flow that is 45% of the natural rate of flow, or 16 cms, whichever is greater at any point in time.
  - For future licences that withdraw from April to October inclusive, a rate of flow that is 45% of the natural rate of flow, or 10 cms, whichever is greater at any point in time.
  - For existing licences with a retrofit provision, a rate of flow that is 45% of the natural rate of flow, or 10 cms, whichever is greater at any point in time.

> The *South Saskatchewan Basin Water Allocation Regulation* (1991) be repealed.

> The Director is authorized to consider applications for transfers of water allocations.

> The Director is authorized to withhold up to 10% of the volume of water being transferred, if it is considered to be in the public interest to protect the aquatic environment or to implement a water conservation objective.

> The Director consider the Matters and Factors provided in this plan in making decisions on applications for licences, preliminary certificates, approvals, or transfers of an allocation of water.

> To improve the efficiency, effectiveness and productivity of water use in the Bow, Oldman, and South Saskatchewan River Sub-basins, three broad avenues be followed by Alberta Environment and water users.

- Continue to improve water management and administration of water allocations.
- The development of water markets and transfers.
- Encourage improvements in water conservation by water users.

next steps

The Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACS) are encouraged to consider the priorities in their watersheds and undertake future watershed management planning with this water management plan serving as a foundation. These Councils will work together to ensure their individual planning is aligned with the SSRB plan.

The SSRB plan is the senior plan within the SSRB and all other water management plans in the SSRB are to be consistent with it. It is recognized that improvements to the SSRB plan may be made as research results and other data becomes available.

Successful implementation of the plan relies on both the legislated responsibility of Alberta Environment and through the cooperation of partners.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information, or to read the entire South Saskatchewan River Basin Water Management Plan, visit www.environment.gov.ab.ca or call (403) 297-6250.

This document is printed on chlorine-free paper made from 100 per cent post-consumer fibre. In choosing this paper, Alberta Environment saved 1,310 litres of water, harnessed 107 kilograms of wood and diverted 12 kilograms of waste from landfills.

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